

# Affirming God as Panentheistic and Embodied

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**Abstract** In an anthology on panentheism, Keith Ward assesses the appropriateness of the metaphor of embodiment for God, as well as the viability of the concept of panentheism itself, as he considers the theologies of Ramanuja, Hegel, and process thought. Ward frames polar problems with respect to the analogy of self-body/God-world and to the concept of panentheism. (1) Ramanuja and Hegel's theologies ultimately deny the freedom and compromise the independence and otherness of the creatures. (2) Process theology compromises divine sovereignty and perfection, making God too passible to the world's evils. This article attempts to transcend such one-sided approaches as it develops a balanced concept of panentheism and a metaphor of divine embodiment that provide for mutual influence between God and the world, wherein both the suffering and happiness of the world affect God, while maintaining sole divine causal ultimacy with respect to the world.

**Keywords** Panentheism · Embodiment · Pantheism · Indeterminism · Transcendence · Immanence · Ultimacy · Process theology · Ramanuja · Hegel · Whitehead · Charles Hartshorne · Keith Ward · Niels Henrik Gregersen · Paul Tillich

In this article, I will analyze and critique several versions or purported versions of panentheism. In so doing, I will reference contributions from *In Whom We Live and Have Our Being: Panentheistic Reflections on God's Presence in a Scientific World*, especially that by Keith Ward, and several other contemporary sources, as well as German idealist, process, and Hindu thinkers. I will conclude that a viable embodied, panentheistic model of the nature of God is feasible, one that draws from the strengths and avoids the weaknesses of other models. Ward titles his contribution to the just-mentioned anthology, 'The World as the Body of God: A Panentheistic Metaphor.' In this chapter, Ward assesses the appropriateness of that metaphor of embodiment for

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God, as well as the viability of the concept of panentheism itself, as he bounces off the theologies of Ramanuja, Hegel, and process thought, all of which he considers to be versions of panentheism. Ward frames polar problems with respect to the analogy of self/body/God-world: (1) for Ramanuja and Hegel, the self totally constitutes the body or world as an expression of itself, thus ultimately denying the freedom and compromising the independence and otherness of the creatures, and (2) for process theology, the body totally constitutes the self (which is, the divine consequent nature), thus compromising divine sovereignty and perfection, making God too passible to the world's evils.<sup>1</sup>

## Divine Transcendence and Immanence

Ward's polarities relate to panentheism's attempts to configure rightly divine transcendence and immanence and their interrelationships. Of course, the *raison d'être* of panentheism was to re-balance transcendence and immanence in light of modern scientific knowledge. Rejecting what its originators considered the neglect of divine immanence in classical theism and deism, it attempted to affirm a strong divine interest and presence in the world but without supernatural intervention that controverted natural laws. Transcendence and immanence in relation to God do not represent simple opposites; they may overlap depending on what angle or issue is at stake. For our purposes, several distinctions will prove helpful.

Divine transcendence or beyondness of the world involves both what we can call qualitative and quantitative aspects—which in turn may involve some overlapping: (1) God's attributes surpass those of any creature, and (2) God's reality or being is distinct from that of the world. The greater significance and scope of divine power compared with any worldly power represents one aspect of qualitative transcendence. For Ward, the panentheistic models of Ramanuja and Hegel emphasize absolutely the causality of the divine self, so that the causal power of the (body of the) world becomes nothing in relation to God. As Ward recognizes, this compromises the freedom of the creatures.<sup>2</sup> Notice that such divine determinism could compromise the quantitative aspect of transcendence; if God completely causes the world and all its creatures, are they perhaps modes or attributes of God, even if lesser modes or attributes? Therefore, one could view transcendence in the sense of absolute causal power as entailing excessive immanence in the world. While God's reality may involve much that transcends this world, divine determinism would seem to entail an unremitting one-to-one correspondence of the world to one aspect of God.

This brings us to a final aspect of divine transcendence of the world, namely, that God may enjoy values, goodness, and bliss apart from and in addition to whatever values, goodness, and happiness that God derives from this world (and any other world of creatures). Ramanuja and Hegel's conceptions of God (at least as construed by

<sup>1</sup> Keith Ward, 'The World as the Body of God: A Panentheistic Metaphor,' in *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being*, ed. Philip Clayton and Arthur Peacocke (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans), pp. 62–72. Ward notes that Hegel does not regard the universe as the body of God, precisely because finite selves do not wholly control their bodies (p. 65).

<sup>2</sup> Ward, 'World as Body of God,' pp. 66–67.

Ward) involve the realization by God of infinite value apart from the world, which for Ward represents a strength of their models.<sup>3</sup>

If divine transcendence emphasizes the distinctness of God from the world quantitatively, divine immanence can cause some blurring of that distinctness. Indeed, some blurring quantitatively would seem to come into play with Western monotheism, whether acknowledged or not. For divine omniscience entails an immediacy, a certain lack of separation or externality. The finite subject-object structure of creaturely knowing always involves some ignorance and externality. Theology has found such deficiency unacceptable for divine knowing. As Augustine put it, ‘God is closer to us than we are to ourselves.’

If divine transcendence is sometimes associated with God as a cause that affects but remains unaffected, divine immanence may be associated with God as effect or as being affected by the world and its individuals. As suggested above, Ward charges that for process theology, God’s self as concrete, as the divine consequent nature, is wholly determined or constituted by the world or body of God.

## Two Western Panentheistic Traditions—Plus an Eastern One

Before assessing Ward’s critique of the two forms of embodied divinity and attendant pantheisms, I will note the similarity of his polarities to panentheistic polarities posited by others. In a chapter in the same volume as Ward’s piece, Niels Henrik Gregersen writes that different versions of pantheism share ‘both active and responsive aspects of divinity vis-à-vis the world.’<sup>4</sup> Gregersen goes on to expound upon an ‘expressivist pantheism,’ with none other than Hegel as primary exemplar,<sup>5</sup> and a ‘dipolar or Whiteheadian pantheism.’<sup>6</sup> The former emphasizes God’s active self-expression, while the latter emphasizes ‘passive absorption of experiences into God’ rather than ‘active transformation of creatures.’<sup>7</sup> For my part, I identify an active and passive aspect of pantheism; the former focusing on divine power or God as cause and the latter on divine knowledge and sympathetic receptivity.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Mariusz Tabaczek describes two forms of pantheism available for contemporary theology, one Hegelian, the other Whiteheadian.<sup>9</sup> Not coincidentally, I take the German-American theologian Paul Tillich as my primary exemplar of a pantheism emphasizing the active aspect of divinity and Charles Hartshorne, the principal theological interpreter of Whitehead, as primary exemplar emphasizing the passive aspect. Thus, we can readily identify a German idealist and Romantic idealist tradition of pantheism, on the one hand, and a process tradition on the other. Notice that, while other thinkers construe the two traditions as *emphasizing* one aspect to the relative

<sup>3</sup> Ward, ‘World as Body of God,’ pp. 63–64.

<sup>4</sup> Niels Henrik Gregersen, ‘Three Varieties of Pantheism,’ in *In Whom We Live*, p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> Gregersen, ‘Three Varieties,’ pp. 27–31.

<sup>6</sup> Gregersen, ‘Three Varieties,’ pp. 31–34.

<sup>7</sup> Gregersen, ‘Three Varieties,’ p. 33.

<sup>8</sup> David H. Nikkel, *Pantheism in Hartshorne and Tillich: A Creative Synthesis* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995); ‘Pantheism,’ Entry in *The Encyclopedia of Science and Religion* (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2003).]

<sup>9</sup> Mariusz Tabaczek, ‘Hegel and Whitehead: In Search for Sources of Contemporary Versions of Pantheism in the Science-Theology Dialogue,’ *Theology and Science* 11/2 (2013), pp. 143–161.

neglect of the others, Ward writes as if active causality and passive receptivity, respectively, stand as mutually exclusive in Hegelian versus process traditions. In so framing the models, Ward proves helpful, whether intentionally or not, in uncovering the difficulties when either aspect is taken to an extreme.

Ward adds an Eastern twist to these two Western models. There is a sense in which the Hindu worldview devalues bodies and embodiment; ignorance causes us to wrongly find our identity in a self embodied in the material universe rather than in connection to the supreme self. Thus, God's body, the world, stems from the ignorance of the creatures and, from the divine perspective, constitutes God's play. As Ward insightfully declares, 'Bodies exist to enable the karma of spirits to be worked out. The body is the instrument of the self, more like clothing than like skin.'<sup>10</sup> Ward correctly emphasizes that the material universe is a self-expression of God and under God's control for Ramanuja, as is the case with Hegel.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, he recognizes that Ramanuja (like Hegel) tries to uphold human freedom and responsibility. Ward suggests that Ramanuja reconciles divine determinism and human freedom through compatibilism, as does Hegel as well as Calvin.<sup>12</sup> However, while Ramanuja stipulates that God must grant permission for the finite soul to act, he indicates that this 'action primarily depends upon the volitional effort of the soul,' suggesting indeterminism as to whether the soul decides to move closer to or further from God.<sup>13</sup> Consequently, many interpreters view Ramanuja as an indeterminist. While God controls the structures of the universe, including the structures governing karma and reincarnation, God allows the human atman or self to choose its direction.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, Ward's second exemplar of the world as a divine self-expression, Hegel, is uncontroversially a determinist. Ward expresses surprise that Hegel is sometimes considered a pantheist rather than a panentheist.<sup>15</sup> I would contend that this is not at all surprising, precisely because of Hegel's determinism. Indeed, I join those who classify Hegel as pantheistic.

Before arguing that position, a brief excursion into the genealogy of the terms *pantheism* and *panentheism* in the context of nineteenth-century German idealism and Romantic idealism will prove helpful. This idealism spawned various versions of both, with no universally accepted distinction between the two terms. Apparently unaware of K. C. F. Krause's coining of the term *panentheism*, Schelling referred to his philosophy of religion as 'true pantheism,'<sup>16</sup> even with his later emphasis on divine and human indeterminate freedom. Gustav Theodor Fechner, having the advantage of Krause's term, offered probably the clearest and most fully developed panentheistic

<sup>10</sup> Ward, 'World as Body of God,' pp. 65.

<sup>11</sup> Ward, 'World as Body of God,' pp. 63–64.

<sup>12</sup> Ward, 'World as Body of God,' pp. 66–67.

<sup>13</sup> Ramanuja, in *Sacred Books of the East*, trans. George Thibaut, ed. F. Max Muller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904), p. 557; in *Philosophers Speak of God*, Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 184–185.

<sup>14</sup> For example, a Western interpreter, Philip Clayton, 'Panentheisms East and West,' *Sophia* 49/2 (2010), pp. 188–190; and an Eastern interpreter, Abha Singh, 'Social Philosophy of Ramanuja: Its Modern Relevance,' *Indian Philosophical Quarterly* 28/4 (October 2001), pp. 495–496.

<sup>15</sup> Ward, 'World as Body of God,' p. 65.

<sup>16</sup> John W. Cooper, *Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), p. 95.

model, which included mutual indeterminate freedom.<sup>17</sup> Ward's surprise at the consideration of Hegel as a pantheist may stem from missing how central the notion of freedom was to Romantic idealism and its advocates who adopted the term *panentheism*. In embracing more organic and affective understandings of the relationship between God and world, it reacted against enlightenment mechanism and logical necessity. Interestingly, Charles Hartshorne first labeled his process theology as 'The New Pantheism,' until he learned of Krause's term.<sup>18</sup>

## Emphasizing Divine Transcendence and Active Causality—Hegel and Hinduism

In this section, I will focus on panentheism as emphasizing active divine self-expression to the neglect of divine passivity or receptivity through consideration of Hegel's and Hindu theology. One could say that panentheism attempts to get as close to pantheism as possible in stressing the intimate relationship between God and the world, while still maintaining clear distinctions between them. In my judgment, mutual indeterminate freedom constitutes a crucial distinction. Indeed, I agree with Hartshorne on the need to uphold some mutual indeterminism in defining panentheism.<sup>19</sup> Of course, the historically dominant form of Western classical theism, like Hegel and arguably Ramanuja, accepts divine determinism. However, it upholds the externality of the created world to God. When one holds with Hegel that the world is part of God and the divine life, it appears that little ground remains on which to deny that creatures are in some sense a mode of the divine.

Ward makes two suggestions against considering Hegel a pantheist. First, Ward notes that the world could not serve as the body of God for Hegel, as selves 'do not, in general, wholly control bodies.' He adds that a lack of complete control would subject an embodied (and in this context pantheistic) God to time and suffering.<sup>20</sup> In a different context, Gregersen affirms Ward's recognition that for Hegel divine transcendence entails that evil as evil does not exist in God.<sup>21</sup> Here Ward appears to assume the following two factors favor the label of 'panentheism' rather than 'pantheism': (1) the universe having 'no independent causal role in the constitution of the divine being' as God exercises complete control while the creatures exercise none in relation to God, and (2) pantheism entails that God is affected by the temporality and negativity of the world. However, pantheism often involves such complete divine control, as in the famous example of Spinoza. Moreover, finite suffering has no effect on the beatitude of Spinoza's pantheistic God. Advaita ('non-dual') Hinduism, typically classified as an acosmic form of pantheism, would express a similar view; evil in no way constitutes or conditions the infinite, undifferentiated divine, nirguna Brahman, and its bliss. And as

<sup>17</sup> Gustav Theodor Fechner, *Zend-Avesta: Oder ueber die Dinge des Himmels und des Jenseits, Vom Standpunkt der Naturbeschreibung*, 5th ed., (Leipzig: Leopold Voss, 1922).

<sup>18</sup> Charles Hartshorne, 'The New Pantheism I and II,' *Christian Register* 115 (February 1936).

<sup>19</sup> E.g., Hartshorne, *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Vergilius Ferm (New York: Philosophical Library, 1945), s.v. 'panentheism,' s.v. 'transcendence.'

<sup>20</sup> Ward, 'World as Body of God,' p. 65.

<sup>21</sup> Gregersen, 'Three Varieties,' p. 30.

mentioned above, panentheists typically insist on some indeterminate creaturely freedom.

Second, Ward invokes divine transcendence of worldly self-expression, claiming that for Hegel, the ‘whole temporal process’ of the world constitutes ‘only a small part’ of God’s being.<sup>22</sup> In itself, such transcendence would not appear to save a theology from pantheism. Consider advaita Hinduism, the acosmic pantheism mentioned just above, which insists on the absolute identity of Brahman/Atman with finite atmans or selves/souls. Though divine Brahman expresses itself in many worlds and all finite selves, these self-expressions add nothing to the divine bliss or fulfillment. While for Hegel, the cosmos is ‘in some sense a part of what God essentially is’<sup>23</sup> (which is definitely not the case with advaita theology), Ward still sees the world as playing little role in divine fulfillment since ‘the Spirit is complete in itself, eternally self-conscious and perfect.’<sup>24</sup> In further describing the seemingly paradoxical nature of Hegelian dialectic, Ward maintains that ‘God is incomplete without some world, which is . . . part of the divine perfection.’<sup>25</sup> Concerning Hegel’s notion of God’s eternal completeness and referencing his *Encyclopedia*, Gregersen makes the following points: an ‘eternal content’ abides in God as Father—though the nature or ‘content’ of this content is not specified. Differentiation of this ‘eternal being’ occurs in the Son. It seems, though, that the self-consciousness essential for divinity arises only with the differentiation within God of the Son, not in the Father and its eternal content alone. ‘God is God only to the extent that God knows Godself; God’s self-knowing is, further, a self-consciousness in humanity and humanity’s knowledge of God, which proceeds to humanity’s self-knowing in God’ [emphases original]; the latter part of the process being the work of the Spirit.<sup>26</sup> While Gregersen highlights the temporal nature of this process, Ward focuses on the ‘block view’ of time in Hegel.<sup>27</sup> This whole process of differentiation and reunion is eternally complete within God, with respect to the immanent Trinity; the process involves incompleteness only in the world and the economic Trinity. Yet, this process of the completion of divinity can be interpreted as involving less transcendence of and more dependence on the world than Ward and perhaps Gregersen allow. As Joseph Prabhu puts it, ‘To become a concrete and truly spiritual God, the immanent trinity must be re-enacted in the economic trinity in the form of worldly incursion. The internal self-differentiation of God must be expressed in actuality, if the differentiation is to be taken seriously.’ Prabhu does note that this ‘dependence’ stems from God’s necessary activity<sup>28</sup> (which takes us back to the pantheistic implications of Hegel’s determinism). So even if Ward’s view of Hegelian divine transcendence of worldly self-expression is correct, that the world plays only a small part in divine fulfillment, the finite selves constitute necessary parts of the being of God. Therefore, none of the

<sup>22</sup> Ward, ‘World as Body of God,’ p. 65.

<sup>23</sup> Ward, ‘World as Body of God,’ p. 65.

<sup>24</sup> Ward, ‘World as Body of God,’ p. 64.

<sup>25</sup> Ward, ‘World as Body of God,’ p. 65.

<sup>26</sup> Gregersen, ‘Three Varieties,’ p. 30; G. F. W. Hegel, *Enzyklopadie der philosophischen Wissenschaften* (1830), no. 564, translation from Peter C. Hodgson, ed. *Hegel: Theologian of the Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 144.

<sup>27</sup> Ward, ‘World as Body of God,’ p. 64.

<sup>28</sup> Joseph Prabhu, ‘Hegel’s Secular Theology,’ *Sophia* 49/2 (2010), p. 226.

possible arguments based on divine transcendence in Hegel appear to succeed in clearing him of the ‘charge’ of pantheism.

What can we say about the disadvantages of a panentheism (or pantheism) where divine transcendence, causality, and control are overemphasized? As already suggested, Ward and I agree on the need for creaturely freedom in a viable concept of God. And on that score, mere compatibilism will not do; Ward insists that genuine human freedom must involve some indeterminism.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, we agree on the unacceptability of any concept of panentheism or metaphor of divine embodiment where God determines and controls everything in the world. Determinism also undermines the distinctness of the creatures as ‘in’ God but not identical with the divine—thus crossing the line into pantheism in my view. The overemphasis on divine transcendence also undermines that the world affects God in the sense of contributing to divine fulfillment. Even in Ramanuja’s vishishtavaita (‘qualified non-dualism’) Hindu theology, and even if one interprets it as indeterministic, the world makes no contribution to divine fulfillment; for as Ward correctly notes, ‘divine perfection is essentially changeless’ for Ramanuja.<sup>30</sup> With respect to Hegel, the world’s evil in no way conditions God. Moreover, whatever positive contribution creation makes to divine fulfillment results completely from God’s causal activity; the creatures make no contribution in their own right. Thus, a panentheism that emphasizes divine transcendence, causality, and control to the exclusion of any genuine divine passivity is found wanting.

At this point, I will suggest a panentheism drawing on a strength of Hindu theology and Western idealism that emphasize divine causal activity, while avoiding their potential problems; God serves as the ultimate beneficent cause of the world—where God expresses Godself through the world metaphorized as the body of God, but where God does not deterministically make all the choices of the creatures, where the world is not a total or perfect self-expression due to indeterminate freedom, and where creaturely choices genuinely affect and make a difference for God as immanent. For this model, a world where God enables indeterminate freedom is closer to perfection than one without it. Enabling spontaneity and freedom in creation and mutual influence of God and world more truly express the nature of the divine self than does divine determinism or impossibility.

## Emphasizing Divine Immanence and Passivity—the Process Tradition

I turn now to Ward’s other pole, wherein process panentheism allegedly entails that the body of the world totally constitutes the concrete divine self, thus compromising divine transcendence in terms of sovereignty and perfection. Here, I believe Ward overstates the case. The primordial nature determines the possibilities for the universe. Due to its ‘relatively abstract’ nature as mere potential,<sup>31</sup> I grant Ward that it does not play any direct role in constituting the actual divine self. However, Ward fails to recognize that, according to process panentheism, the divine activity of providing the initial aim—God’s preference for decision/action—to each creaturely ‘unit occasion’ exercises a

<sup>29</sup> Ward, ‘World as Body of God,’ p. 67.

<sup>30</sup> Ward, ‘World as Body of God,’ p. 66.

<sup>31</sup> Ward, ‘World as Body of God,’ p. 68.



huge influence on the world and the divine consequent nature, that is, on the actual or concrete divine self. Rather, he quickly dismisses such ‘superjective aspects’ of God ‘as influential but not primarily causative.’<sup>32</sup> Yet, at least on process theology’s own terms, this influence is quite significant. Indeed, without it, all that would exist would be chaotic, low-grade unit occasions rather than our universe. One interpreter, Robert Cummings Neville, has in effect compared the power of the divine initial aim with that of divine efficient causal determinism, labeling the process God ‘a smother-mother.’<sup>33</sup> While I think Neville overstates the case for the possible influence of ‘persuasion’ and while I regard the lack of any empirical evidence for the existence of initial aims from God as a huge problem, still Ward is not entirely fair to Whiteheadian/Hartshornean theology.

Nevertheless, I quite agree with Ward that process thought unduly undermines divine sovereign power or the active aspect of God in panentheism. I accept the theological significance of creation *ex nihilo*, that the universe and its constituents have no ultimate ontological independence from God, rather than the process view that unit occasions in their bare existence possess an ultimate independence of being. In addition to the Christian tradition, one can offer a philosophical argument for creation from nothing. A satisfactory explanation of the universe, or of why anything exists, must address the relationship of possibility to actuality. That is, of all possibilities, why have only certain possibilities as to the nature of our universe achieved actualization? I submit that the most satisfactory explanation of the universe should postulate a reservoir or source of all possibility. Whitehead felt this need and posited the primordial nature of God as the principle of limitation. In a non-temporal decision, God determined which possibilities out of all potentiality would be available to our universe.<sup>34</sup> However, possibility here is only abstract rather than the source of concrete actuality. For concrete realities—unit occasions of experience—come into bare existence through the principle of creativity, rather than through divine power, and then receive more particular possibilities from which to choose. This implies that both this ultimate principle of creativity and God serve as an ultimate source of possibility for unit occasions which become actual. Thus, we have one source for inchoate realities and another that allows for their definition. Positing one ultimate source of all possibilities rather than two is cleaner, as it eliminates concern with how and whether these two ultimate sources might relate to each other.

Granting creation *ex nihilo*, God’s sustaining power upholds the creation and its creatures in each moment; without it, the universe would vanish. For me, this entails that, in immediately upholding the universe, God immediately empowers creaturely possession and use of some indeterminate spontaneity and freedom. While I see the need for a panentheistic model to declare explicitly such empowerment, I find necessary such an entailment for any Christian or other theology that affirms both creation from nothing and indeterminate freedom. Of course, Whitehead insisted on the ultimate ontological independence of the world precisely because he worried that ultimate ontological dependence upon God would preclude any creaturely freedom.

<sup>32</sup> Ward, ‘World as Body of God,’ p. 68.

<sup>33</sup> Robert C. Neville, *Creativity and God*, new ed. (Albany: State University of New York, Press, 1995), p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), pp. 178–79; *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (New York: Macmillan, 1929)—Corrected ed. Edited by David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: Macmillan, 1978), p. 522.



I see no reason, though, why the upholding of creatures in their freedom is impossible or implausible. Indeed, if God is the ultimate ground of all potentiality and actuality, what reality inside or outside of the divine could prevent God from empowering creaturely indeterminate freedom?

I also endorse a stronger notion of divine power in terms of providence than does process theology, in holding that God directly determines the fundamental conditions, structures, and laws of the universe (analogous to efficient causation in the universe rather than final causation). Thus, I conclude that one can overcome weaknesses of the process model with a stronger version of divine transcendence, causality, and control than it has, while still maintaining the indeterminate creaturely freedom crucial to that model.

Given my endorsement of a strong active aspect of God in my model of panentheism, I need to address the following issue: Ward questions calling ‘the finite persons “parts of God,”’ particularly if one accepts God’s ultimate ontological priority, for this terminology ‘would seem to deny their otherness.’<sup>35</sup> I have affirmed in this article some otherness and distinctness of the creatures in relation to God for any panentheism that steers clear of pantheism. Ward’s concern here seems to reflect a narrow reading of mereology, of the possible relationships between parts and wholes, assuming the undifferentiated, quasi-materialistic, or substantialistic nature of the divine whole. In particular, wholes may be greater than the sum of their parts, and attributes of the parts may not apply to the whole. While the universe is part of God, God and the universe do not form an undifferentiated whole. Panentheism draws definite distinctions between God as the including whole and the non-divine parts of the universe considered in themselves. Certain properties of divinity apply to God but definitely not to the individual creatures or to the universe itself. As previously stated, another important distinction concerns mutual freedom.

While criticizing the process view of divine causality, I fully subscribe to process theology’s most significant contribution in my estimation, which relates to the aspect of passivity or receptivity: perfect divine knowledge and perfect sympathy or compassion for all that occurs in the universe.<sup>36</sup> Given both indeterminate freedom and the inevitability of natural evil in a finite world, suffering inevitably occurs and does affect the *degree* of the divine happiness. I find it perplexing that Ward demurs from the process contention that ‘the greatest possible knowledge must include the actual experiences of all finite beings.’<sup>37</sup> My own intuitive sense of God’s omniscience has always acknowledged that God knows immediately whatever I think or feel, from ‘the inside’ rather than externally. I also believe that classical theism’s understanding of omniscience entails direct knowledge (albeit in tension with its insistence on impassibility). Process theology has never held that God’s evaluation of a murderer’s

<sup>35</sup> Ward, ‘World as Body of God,’ p. 69.

<sup>36</sup> Fechner already articulated a strong sense of divine sympathy: ‘Is not the best God for us who bears within himself our good fortune and misfortune? . . . What would he be if he looked upon our misery merely from the outside, as we look upon the misery of a beggar in rags to whom we throw a penny? . . . God does not view your pain merely from the outside, but he feels it along with yourself. . . .’ *Zend Avesta*, p. 249, as quoted with ellipses in Charles Hartshorne and William L. Reese, *Philosophers Speak of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. vi.

<sup>37</sup> Ward, ‘World as Body of God,’ p. 70.

motivation known completely by God, to use Ward's example, simply accepts the murderer's evaluation. The rule of thumb here, as for pantheism in general, is that God includes *and* transcends.

## A Balanced Pantheism and the Problem of Evil

I believe I have established the possibility of, even the plausibility of, a balanced construal of pantheism, and potentially of the self-body analogy for God, which avoids the polar pitfalls set out by Ward. In the conclusion of his article, Tabaczek wonders why Christian pantheistic theologians have heavily drawn upon Whitehead while ignoring Hegel.<sup>38</sup> I would answer that the overriding factor is that these theologians favor some indeterminate freedom over determinism. But Tabaczek rightly senses that pantheistic theology can take significant insights from the German idealist tradition. Instead of one-sided approaches, where God either totally determines the world or where the world overdetermines God, there is mutual influence appropriate to God's status as God and our status as creatures. Instead of either the self wholly constituting the body or the body constituting the self, mutual influence pertains. Thus, I have attempted to overcome a deterministic pantheism or any pantheism that compromises creaturely indeterminate freedom or some creaturely ability to affect the divine life, as well as to overcome deficiencies in process theology's concept of divine causality, in drawing a pantheism that hopefully does justice to both the active (or self-expressive) and passive (or receptive) aspects of the divine and, thus, represents a full-fledged pantheism.

Some, however, reject pantheism because they cannot countenance the notion that any evil exists 'in God.' I will now address that important issue. Ward and Gregersen are among those who do not accept any pantheistic model for the relationship between our *present* world and God. Only when creaturely lives find their consummation in God and God has overcome all evil can the world be said to truly reside 'in' God.<sup>39</sup> Ward concurs with Polkinghorne's approval of 'eschatological pantheism'<sup>40</sup> (a phrase first used by Tillich), while Gregersen labels such a model 'soteriological pantheism.'<sup>41</sup>

In defending that the evil along with the good of this universe is in God, I would first point out that 'in' is a spatial metaphor for the relationship of God and world, open to various interpretations. Next, I appeal to the previously mentioned fact that an attribute of a part often does not apply to the whole. Soreness in my big toe does not make me less of a moral person nor does it necessarily mean that overall I do not feel happy. Similarly, that evil is an intimate part of the divine life in no way denies God's moral perfection or the overall divine beatitude. With process theology, I judge that overall good outweighs evil in this universe and, thus, divine sympathetic inclusion of the world adds to the divine happiness in each moment. Contra process theology, I additionally maintain that God may obtain extraterrestrial, non-temporal values apart

<sup>38</sup> Tabaczek, 'Whitehead and Hegel,' p. 158.

<sup>39</sup> Relative to Christian theology and relatively speaking, Ward and Gregersen put more emphasis on a doctrine of salvation, while I place more emphasis on a doctrine of creation.

<sup>40</sup> Ward, 'World as Body of God,' pp. 71–72.

<sup>41</sup> Gregersen, 'Three Varieties,' pp. 24–27.

from social relationships, including the value of the divine sense of its own existence as well as aesthetic and other values. Additionally, God may derive happiness from other universes besides our own.

For me, the most telling argument in favor of the ‘in-ness’ of the world to God concerns divine ultimacy with respect to the world. If the world stands in ultimate ontological dependence upon God, I see no room for the externality of the world to God. Interestingly, Christopher C. Knight notes that, when Eastern patristic theologians spoke of creation from nothing, they referred not to an absolute nothingness but to the ‘uncreated possibilities’ that lay within God as ground and abysmal depth.<sup>42</sup> If God created using realities with some inherent ontological independence from God, it would make sense to maintain the externality of the world to God. However, if the divine serves as the reservoir of all possibility and creates from possibilities within God, what sense does it make to declare that the creatures are simply or strictly external to God? Granting that God does not desire evil and granting the reality of creaturely indeterminate freedom, identity does not govern the internal relations of the divine life. As asserted above, differentiation exists within the divine life as including whole. But no place exists for externality and separation like that of finite individuals to one another. God transcends the distinction between subject and object. As Tillich enjoined, God is not a being alongside other beings but in some sense being-itself.

Finally, the ultimacy and associated non-externality of God with respect to the world contain an important moral dimension. For me, the God who does not suffer with the suffering of the world is less ultimate and divine than the God who does. If the negativity of the world is real for God, then I maintain that it must retain a lasting impact on the divine life. Yes, the negativity may contribute to a greater good and may be in some real sense mostly overcome. But nothing can controvert the reality that creatures suffered in the temporal world. It makes no sense to me to hold that this real negativity has no real impact on the divine life, that this negative element has no negative effect on the degree of divine blessedness.

## Panentheism and the Embodiment of God

As the ‘conflict and suffering and evil in the world’ preclude for Ward any panentheism with respect to the world as it is, so too do they lead him to conclude that ‘it does not look as if the world is the body of God.’<sup>43</sup> While I have just addressed the issue of evil, Ward’s discussion raises wider issues concerning the appropriateness of the metaphor of the world as the body of God. Metaphors and analogies always involve an element of unlikeness as well as likeness, of negation as well as affirmation. It is incumbent on us to acknowledge the unlikeness involved in any metaphor pertaining to God. Ward’s treatment of process theology, focusing on Whitehead, does not mention Hartshorne’s development of the ‘mind-body’ analogy for God and world, including Hartshorne’s stipulations to preserve divine perfection or unsurpassability. These include the following: (1) God does not have an external environment outside of the body with which to contend, (2) divine embodiment in no way threatens God’s existence, which is

<sup>42</sup> Christopher C. Knight, ‘Theistic Naturalism and the Word Made Flesh,’ in *In Whom We Live*, pp. 59–60.

<sup>43</sup> Ward, ‘World as Body of God,’ p. 71.

necessary, and (3) unlike our limited knowledge of our own cells, God omnisciently encompasses the world's actuality.<sup>44</sup> While accepting a general panentheism, in the same volume as the Ward and Gregersen pieces, the late Arthur Peacocke objects to the world as the body of God in any literal or apparently any metaphorical sense, due to 'the distortions of any model of the world as God's body.'<sup>45</sup> That God would need to know all about this 'body' is one of the reasons behind Peacocke's objection.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, at the same time, Peacocke welcomes another panentheistic metaphor, 'the panentheistic feminine image of the world, as being given existence by God in the very "womb of God."'<sup>47</sup> Given my acceptance of the principle of creation ex nihilo, I would add an additional stipulation that God has a prime, indeed the primary, role in creating the body of the world, even as the creatures are co-creators of the particularities of that body. The other basis on which Peacocke demurs from the self-body metaphor is that the self must create its 'body' in the divine case.<sup>48</sup> Clearly, a great unlikeness exists with respect to the human organism; the physiological parts of the body constitute a necessity for the functioning of an integrated self. More widely, as we have become aware of the pervasiveness of complex dynamic systems throughout the universe, I would note the mutual necessity of parts and whole for the existence of a given level of complexity. This does not apply in the divine case.

Given the just-mentioned caveats regarding the metaphor of the world as God's body, what justifies employment of this metaphor? What is compelling about the likeness of the relationship between the human self and its body to the relationship between the divine self and the body of the world? We feel many parts of our bodies immediately and directly, and we control many aspects of our bodies immediately and directly. The relationship between self and body is most intimate. When functioning normally, the human organism does not perceive its phenomenal body as something external to itself. Healthy self-love entails loving one's own body. Thus, the elements of likeness are the immediacy, the closeness, the intimacy of God to creation, an intimacy that conveys the significance of the world to God, and the tremendous love God has for the world. As the scientific evidence of the embodied nature of human rationality and meaning continues to mount, the resonance of the world as God's body with our own embodied reality is just too valuable resource to reject or ignore.

<sup>44</sup> For example, Hartshorne, *Man's Vision of God and the Logic of Theism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1941; reprint edition, Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1964), pp. 176–185.

<sup>45</sup> Arthur Peacocke, 'Articulating God's Presence,' in *In Whom We Live*, p. 151.

<sup>46</sup> Peacocke, 'Articulating God's Presence,' pp. 150–151.

<sup>47</sup> Peacocke, 'Articulating God's Presence,' pp. 151–152.

<sup>48</sup> Peacocke, 'Articulating God's Presence,' p. 150.

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